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BACK BAY 1971-72
Back Bay Association
Back Bay Federation for Community Development



419 BOYLSTON STREET
BOSTON, MASS. 02116
TELEPHONE: 267-8070

Back Bay Federation for Community Development

TWO BACK BAYS/ OLD AND NEW

The big news of 1971 was transit. For three years Back Bay Association (BBA) supported legislation to modernize the ramshackle Green Line, which connects Back Bay to downtown and the western suburbs. This year success! The General Court approved a \$90,000,000 modernization of the transit line.

But the most fascinating development of recent months has been the transformation of the Vendome. For five years the Back Bay civic groups fought vigorously to save this old building, and now we are delighted at the handsome restoration being achieved by the new owner.

As transit is modernized, skyscrapers move upward, and restoration proceeds -- it becomes increasingly clear that there are now two Back Bays, clearly delineated and sharply different, but happily quite compatible. North of Newbury Street is Old Back Bay, Victorian, residential, and well protected by an elaborate system of architectural preservation.

South of Newbury Street is New Back Bay, an unprecedented program of new urban development in the form of five major projects: Prudential, nearly complete . . . Hancock and the Christian Science Center, now under construction . . . Park Plaza, awaiting final approval . . . and Copley Square West, now under study.

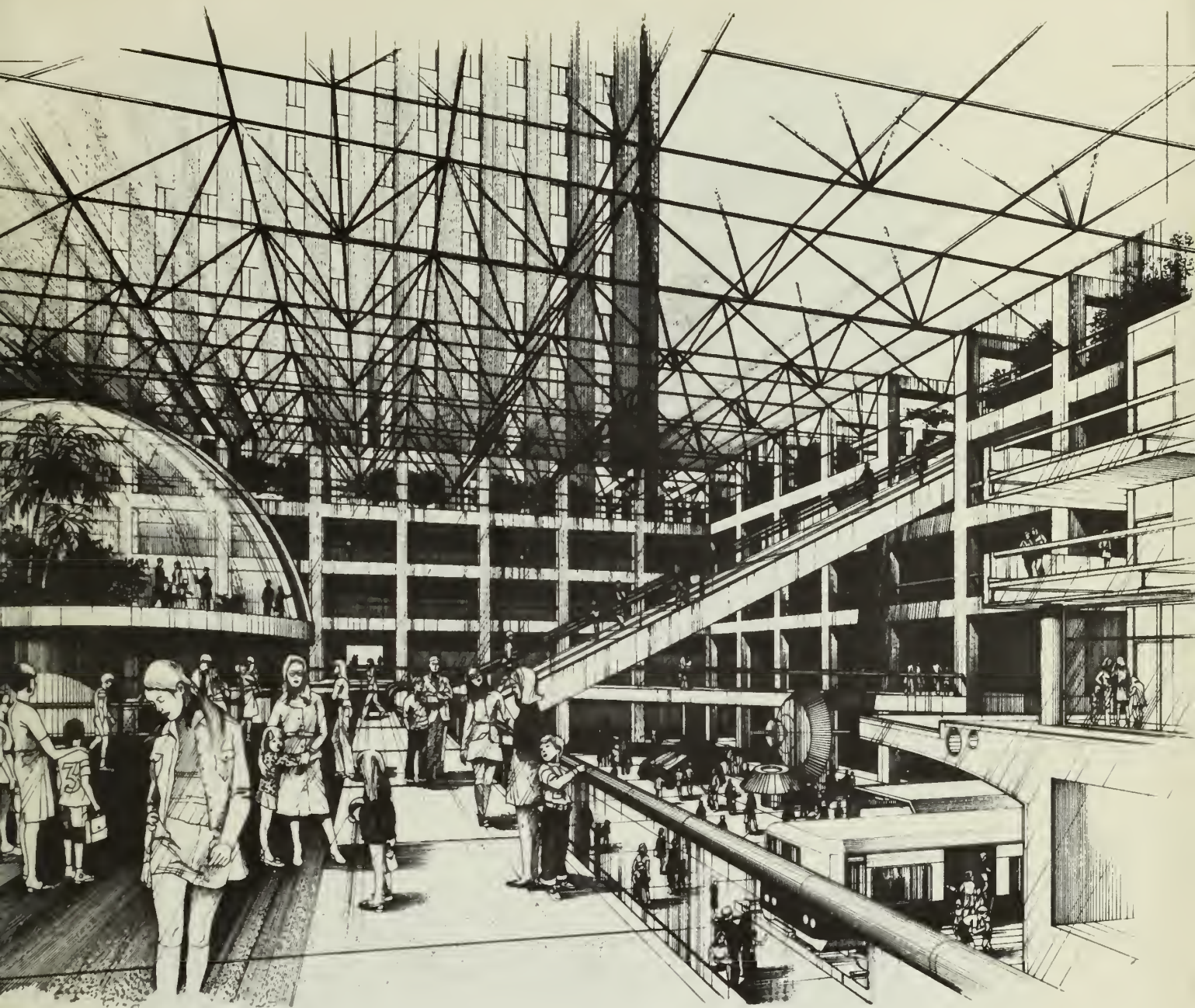
Along with these major projects comes a resurgence of cultural activity: the refurbishing of historic parks, the creation of new gathering places, the magnificent Public Library Addition, the extraordinary concept for Hancock Place (illustration opposite page) all suggest something very important to Urban America. Here in the Back Bay there is beginning an authentic renewal of life in the central City.

Note: This report covers the last fiscal year of BBA ending March 31, 1972.

BACK BAY



ASSOCIATION, INC.
419 BOYLSTON STREET
BOSTON, MASS. 02116
TELEPHONE 266-1766



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Park Square

The 57 Carver Street complex opened this year: a 15 story motor inn with a 7 story public parking facility along with restaurants and cinemas. The first major improvement in this area for many years, the complex provides a strong anchor on the far side of Park Square.

During the past twelve months, attention has been focused on the \$270,000,000 Park Plaza Plan, which was first unveiled at the April 14, 1971 meeting of the BBA in the Statler Hilton Hotel.

The developers, Boston Urban Associates, propose an extraordinary undertaking for the area between Arlington and Tremont Streets. The project is to include 1,600 apartments, an 800 - 1000 room luxury hotel, a retail galleria with 500,000 sq. ft., plus a 1,000,000 sq. ft. office building and 3000 parking spaces.

This proposal won approval from the BRA Board and Mayor White. The Back Bay civic groups also endorsed the proposal, but they recorded a number of specific reservations relative to taxes, transportation, and the impact that the project will have on the Public Garden and the Common.

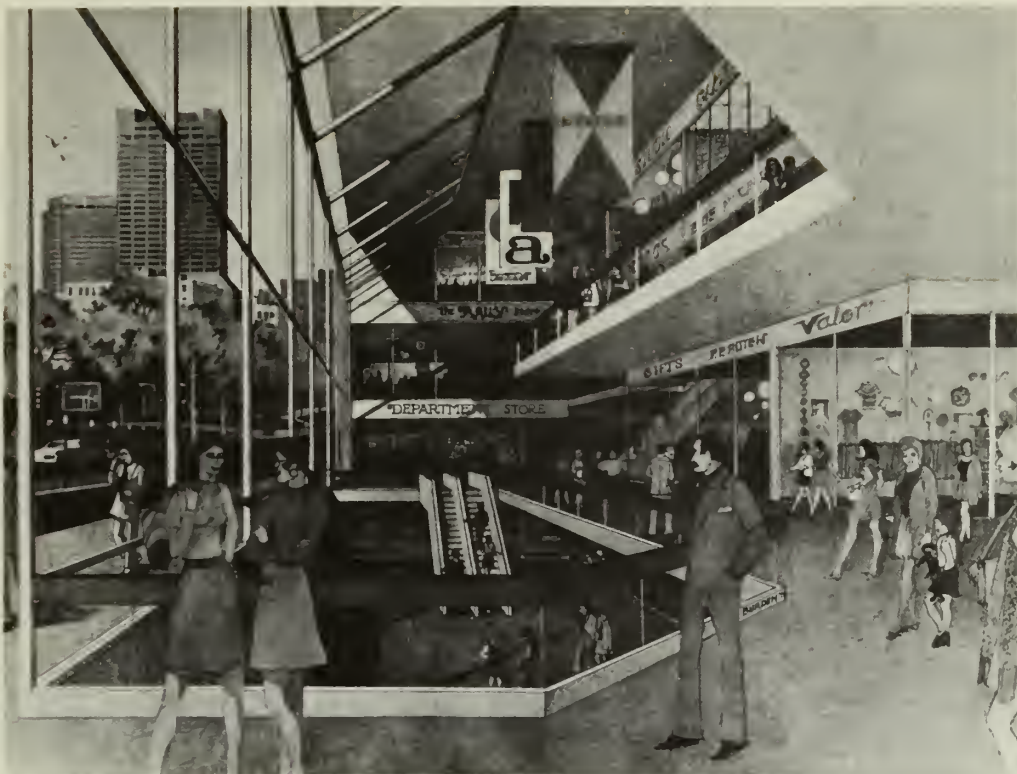
Most -- but not all -- of these problems have now been solved. For additional information see Section V, Transportation and Section VI, Open Spaces, below.

The Boston City Council after 21 long public hearings approved the project in December. Final approval must be obtained from the Massachusetts Department of Community Affairs. Opponents have not been successful in stopping the project but they have managed to slow the approval procedures by several months.

Western International, one of the nation's great hotel chains, will operate the Park Plaza hotel. Developers are now negotiating with prospective retail tenants. Meanwhile, engineering studies and real estate appraisals are being carried out. If there are no further delays land acquisition, demolition and construction of the project can begin in 1973.

John Hancock Complex

The first unit of this major complex will open this summer: a sizable parking facility with shopping arcade. In November the first 34 stories of the tower should be ready for occupancy.



Above: Park Plaza Galleria. See Page 4.

Below: Public Library Addition from Prudential Center.
See Page 7.



The Hancock Complex will be much more than a prestigious location for large scale employment. It will be a lively focus of urban life, day and night, one hundred hours a week or more.

Recently an exciting public facility was announced for Hancock Place. Planned by Hancock and its architect, I. M. Pei and Partners, with support from BBA and the Back Bay Federation, this will be a most generous contribution to the renewal of Back Bay.

At the top of the Hancock Tower will be a glittering new tourist attraction, the observatory with its exhibits of historic Boston, simulated helicopter ride of the metropolis, and other electronic marvels.

Copley Square West

Possibly the most tempting development site in all of Back Bay is the 11 acres of land just southwest of Copley Square at Exit 22 of the Massachusetts Turnpike Extension. For years developers have been eyeing that site.

In 1971 the Codman Company and architect Samuel Glaser produced a new, elaborate, large scale proposal for the area to include 2,700 condominium units, retailing and parking. This project is now under study by the developers, with a review process being carried out by BRA and BBA.

Prudential Center

In August the chic and spacious Sak's Fifth Avenue opened, bringing Bostonians another great store in the Back Bay. At the same time the Prudential garage was expanded to its final stage.

Recently Prudential requested BRA approval for the next element in the Center: a 29 story 468 room hotel to further strengthen Back Bay as one of the nation's leading convention-tourism centers.

Church Center and Fenway Project

There is emerging a strikingly beautiful new center of attraction in the Back Bay: the Christian Science Church Center in the Fenway Urban Renewal Project.

The Sunday School Building, distinctive and handsome, was the first structure to be completed. By late 1972 the high rise Administration Building, the Colonnade Building, the pool and the

plaza should be finished.

Nearby in the Fenway Project the Colonnade Hotel opened in September, giving Boston another first-class hotel with 306 rooms. On Massachusetts Avenue, Church Park, the largest apartment house in Boston is under construction, scheduled for completion in the Spring 1973.

The Huntington Avenue Wasserman development for 300 middle income apartments and shops should go into construction this summer. Meanwhile, the processes of negotiation and developer selection are proceeding for the twin towers near Symphony Hall and Parcel 13 at Massachusetts Avenue and Boylston Street.

II BOYLSTON - NEWBURY STREETS

This was an up and down year for retailing in the Back Bay. It was the year that Sak's arrived and Biglow Kennard left. For the most part, it was a good year, retail sales were up and so was the aggregate of "quality" retail volume.

While conditions were good overall there were glaring weaknesses apparent. Many of the established Back Bay retailers have been hard pressed as a result of broad social changes, recession, fast rising rents, and environmental problems. But relief is certainly on the way in the form of new projects, new business firms, new programs, and new restrictions.

New Projects

The elegant Boston Public Library Addition, designed by noted American architect Philip Johnson, will open in 1972. Meanwhile, BBA has recommended that the City provide a site opposite Prudential for a new Institute of Contemporary Art. These two steps can reaffirm Back Bay's traditional role as a cultural center for the metropolis.

Recently, BBA sponsored the groundbreaking for the attractive new office building under construction by Peter Kanavos at Copley Square scheduled for completion in August, 1973. The Back Bay Federation's proposal for a major parking-retail-housing complex on Exeter Street received preliminary approvals from public agencies in 1971, and hopefully, will move forward in 1972.



545 Boylston Street

New office building now
under construction by
Kanavos Enterprises
at Copley Square

New Businesses

During the early months of 1971 Newbury Street's morale dropped as a high number of vacancies were noted. Then, owners and brokers aided by BBA went to work and the results were a parade of new businesses to the Newbury Street area. Among the newcomers:

Ziba
Peking Decor
Hooper Ames
Fabrications
Honeywell
Kapinos Fauve
Durand
Wellington Jewels

Fred's
Walls & the Coverings Thereof, Inc.
Cervantes
Casa Romero
DuFour's
Bootsmith
Dicken's
Judi Rotenberg Gallery

The activities of BBA's new business committee were wide ranged. When Biglow Kennard left they found the Walden Book Store, a fine shop specializing in hard covered volumes, to fill the gap. The committee assisted Messrs. DuFour and Romero in finding locations and obtaining permits for two outstanding restaurants.

New Programs

The BBA "Promenade Plan" for Boylston Street -- new street and pedestrian lights, trees, and decorative sidewalks -- is being executed by the Boston Public Works Department. So far the work is virtually complete from Dartmouth Street to Dalton. By the end of 1973 it will have been executed all the way to Arlington Street, where the Park Plaza project begins.

Already there is a dazzling change in the lighting west of Copley Square. As the new trees mature, this will become one of the City's lightest, brightest and most interesting streets for evening activity.

At Copley Square Helene Johnson established the June Crafts Fairs and the July - August folk dancing nights along with many other events. In the summer of '72, Copley Square will be an even brighter, busier, more colorful scene.



Copley Square benefactor George B. Henderson
(left center, dark jacket) at May, 1971 ceremony

Last May BBA began experimenting with a street and sidewalk cleaning program from Arlington to Clarendon Streets . . . BBA did the vacuum cleaning and the area was cleaner than ever before. This year the program will continue if the merchants and the City cooperate.

New Restrictions

From time to time it is necessary to establish new restrictions on businesses in the Back Bay to avoid the onslaught of the tawdry, cheap, offensive and dangerous kinds of activities which many ruthless promoters wish to impose upon us.

Recently, BBA obtained a new zoning regulation to restrict restaurants and cocktail lounges on Newbury Street. At about the same time, a new regulation for take-out food restaurants was adopted for the entire area.

Now anyone who wishes to open a restaurant or cocktail lunge on Newbury Street -- or anyone who wishes to open a fast food or take-out restaurant anywhere in Back Bay -- must apply to the Board of Appeal. A hearing will be held and a decision rendered.

BBA has also recommended an extension of the architectural district to include a major portion of the Back Bay business area. Preliminary approval was gained from the City Council last year. Final approvals are expected in 1972. There is still a running dispute over the final boundries, but this should be settled very shortly and the program should move ahead.



Relocated Kanegis Gallery at 244 Newbury Street

Continuing Battles

Each year brings a new wave of applications for liquor licenses, large signs, restaurants, dormitories, -- and most of these applications are very poor in their quality. If all were enacted, the Back Bay would be a gigantic slum today.

BBA reviews every application and opposes most. During the past year, our "win" record was about 80%. In 1972 we expect that we will run into heavier problems, but nevertheless, we hope to improve our record.

The Boylston Newbury Street area will benefit from all of these activities plus improved transportation and open spaces (see Sections V and VI) as well as the expansion of quality housing throughout the Back Bay.

III OLD BACK BAY

Sometimes known as Residential Back Bay, this is the architectural district bounded by the Public Garden, the Charles River, Charlesgate East and Newbury Street.

The 1970 census reports show that a great change occurred in this area during the decade of the 1960's. The student age population increased by 60%; while the population of families, children, and older people declined by 10%; and owner occupancy showed a 25% drop. If this trend were to continue by 1980 residential Back Bay would be a phenomenally congested lodging house district.

However, BBA analysis shows that the area has apparently been stabilized. The great population changes apparently occurred between 1960 and 1967. In the years 1966 - 1968, the Back Bay civic groups obtained a long list of zoning amendments to protect family occupancy and to improve housing quality. These amendments have been working.

Based on zoning, sales, building and other data it now appears that the pendulum is swinging slowly in favor of a limited residential revival. For the indefinite future, we may expect a moderate increase in family residents coupled with a slow decrease of the student population.

The present housing market would probably support a large scale immigration of middle income families into residential Back Bay, however, City housing policies adopted in 1970 make this most



unlikely. The 1970 policies have created a virtual moratorium on new construction and they provide only illusory incentives for housing rehabilitation.

Thus when large numbers of middle income families return to Boston, as BRA predicts -- they will move to other districts of the City or to other parts of the Back Bay including Park Plaza, the Fenway Renewal Area, Copley Square West and St. Botolph Street.

Given these prospects, the events in Residential Back Bay over the past two years have been quite impressive.

Vendome

For five years the Back Bay civic groups waged a vigorous battle to keep this building alive. Early in 1971 the structure was empty, derelict, waterlogged, and vulnerable. Demolition seemed inevitable. Then, came Pasquale Franchi who purchased the building and engaged Stahl Associates to commence the very extraordinary restoration now in progress.

The transformation of the Vendome is clearly the single most exciting action now in progress and it is a superb example of the value of the Back Bay's architectural preservation program.

The Vendome will include 124 fine apartments from \$235 a month up, opening this summer. There will be a two level shopping arcade of 30,000 sq. ft. and dining and lounge facilities. The Cafe Vendome is now open and the outdoor cafe will be open soon.

Somerset

In 1970 Mayor White and the Back Bay civic groups beat off a strong bid by Boston College to acquire the Hotel Somerset for conversion to dormitories. Subsequently, the hotel owner and civic groups sought a new purchaser to convert the building to housing. Once again Pasquale Franchi came to the rescue.

Mr. Franchi acquire this property late in 1971 and is now pursuing a renovation plan which will produce a thoroughly unique residential complex. Under one roof there will be 248 apartments, an enclosed swimming pool, health club, cabaret theater, restaurants and lounges. In addition, there will be an ample supply of parking, luxury office suites, and a few retail shops.

The first component opens in April 1972: a new restaurant. The apartments should be available early in 1973.

If we were issuing awards for "Back Bay Citizen of the Year" (perhaps we should) Pasquale Franchi would be a very strong contender.

Condominiums

A year ago there were four condominium buildings in residential Back Bay. Today there are 11 with more than 250 condominium units. Included is 254 Marlborough Street (at right).

This form of housing is extremely desirable for the Back Bay. It provides another kind of residential choice. It produces more owners of real estate and it encourages social stability. In the long term it will also produce a higher level of property maintenance.

While the condominium movement is growing fast, it is still quite small. Furthermore, it has not yet produced dramatic property improvement since the great majority of the units



converted to condominiums were luxury apartments to begin with. In fact, most of the condominium units are in a single building, the high rise luxury apartment building at 180 Beacon Street.

Other Matters

At no time since the 1920's has there been so much genuinely constructive housing improvements going on in residential Back Bay. Including the Vendome, the Somerset, and a large Beacon Street property, there are approximately 600 new quality apartments of good quality being created at this time. Then, there are the condominiums and numerous cases of small scale rehab improvements. Since the number of large buildings available for conversion to good apartments are limited, this trend may continue only at a rather slow pace.

The new edifice for the First and Second Unitarian Churches, designed by the noted architect, Paul Rudolph, is being completed at this time.

The City has promised to install gas lights along Marlborough Street this year. Since the present lamps will remain, the result will be more illumination along the street. In addition, the gas lamps will add architectural distinction to this stately 19th century street.

IV ST. BOTOLPH STREET

This small neighborhood, just south of Prudential Center, has long been the victim of adverse pressures. But now a resurgence has begun in part because of the influences of neighboring Prudential Center and the Fenway Urban Renewal Project.

Other stimulants include two programs originally recommended by the Back Bay Federation. In 1967 BRA and the Federation recommended a housing for the elderly project on St. Botolph Street. Basic financing has finally been approved and a developer has been appointed to produce a "turnkey" project of 134 units for low income elderly housing. Construction will start this summer.

In 1970 the Federation sought public and private developers to begin a large scale rehabilitation project in the neighborhood. The response was good and a leading private developer is now completing a project of 120 units at Albarmarle Court.

Now two other large rehabilitation projects have begun and there are many other signs of housing improvement in this neighborhood. Month by month the neighborhood is gathering the strength to solve its problems, and to become a first class intown community for people of all incomes.

V.

TRANSPORTATION

The MBTA Green Line is Back Bay's lifeline, connecting this area with downtown Boston and the western suburbs. Unfortunately, this transit service is undependable, overcrowded, and dilapidated. For many years BBA has urged the modernization of the Green Line and the legislature in 1971 authorized a \$90,000,000 program for a partial replacement of the cars together with important signaling, roadbeds, and power improvements.

This is a very important step forward. Shoppers and other mid-day riders from the Western suburbs and from downtown will be the early beneficiaries. They will be riding in style before the mid 1970's.

However, this is by no means a comprehensive solution. Much more transit capacity is needed. This is why BBA expressed concern about the fact that Park Plaza will put more pressure on our heavily used transit system.



At the BBA winter members' meeting: 1. to r. Rep. Maurice E. Frye, Jr., Executive Director Daniel J. Ahern and at the podium BBA President William R. Ebersol.

A review of Park Plaza indicated that the specialized mixture of uses together with deferral of major office construction means that this project will not place an unacceptable load on the transit system for several years, by which time some radical improvements should be in the works.

What radical improvements? In late spring new reports will be available on all of the transit improvement alternatives for Back Bay and we will need to examine these possibilities and commence the long campaign for an optimum program of public transit.

In the years immediately ahead, whether we like it or not, we must request additional parking spaces to match the growing vitality of this area.

Fortunately, there has been solid progress in this field during the last twelve months. The Christian Science Church Center opened a 550 space garage to alleviate parking pressures in that end of the Back Bay. At the same time, a 1000 car facility opened at Park Square, providing a good parking supply at that point. Prudential Center added 636 spaces to complete its facility which has a total capacity of 3051 spaces.

In the summer of 1972 the John Hancock Garage will open with 1830 spaces. Looking further into the future, Park Plaza is scheduled to provide another 3000 spaces and the Exeter Street Development proposed by the Federation would provide about 300 more spaces for the public.

Given this increase in parking plus the Green Line transit improvements plus the hope of more efficient management of street parking spaces, the transportation outlook for the Back Bay should be reasonably good and conditions should significantly improve over the next five years. By then, we should have a new and solid commitment for superior transit services into this area.



From the Church Center looking toward Prudential and Hancock.

The next few years may well see a great renaissance of Back Bay historic parks.

The Commonwealth Avenue Mall is greener and lovelier each spring. Lowden Tree Specialists, originally engaged by the Federation and now by the Parks Department, has discovered the secret of preserving the historic Elm Trees. The Parks Department is moving ahead gradually with the general restoration of the Mall including new lawns, some additional trees, decorative fences, walkways and sprinklers. A new lighting system is under study.

The Dartmouth Street Mall, an excellent example of removing an area from vehicular circulation to pedestrian use, has already paid for itself. It was a factor in the purchase and restoration of the Hotel Vendome. This year the Mall is scheduled for extension from Commonwealth Avenue to Beacon Street.

Copley Square, already the main center of attraction, will be improved this year with more trees, landscaping and lighting.

The long neglected Public Garden is beginning to come along. Last year the Parks Department invested \$50,000 in improvements. In 1972 they will spend \$170,000. The Back Bay civic groups have demanded that this park be fully restored (at a cost up to \$2,000,000) simultaneously with the Park Plaza Urban Renewal project. Although the Public agencies have not yet made any commitment on this scale, the prospects are reasonably bright that the Garden will be lavishly restored over the next three or four years.

***** ILLUSTRATION CREDITS *****

Frank Wing	Front Cover, pgs. 5 (lower), 10, 17, 19, 20 (top)
John Hancock	Pg. 3
Boston Urban Associates	Pg. 5 (top)
Peter Kanavos	Pg. 8
Center Photo Service	Pgs. 9, 15
Calvin Campbell	Pg. 12
Residential Associates of the Back Bay	Pg. 13
Katherine Ahern	Pg. 20 (lower)



COVER PHOTOS/ BOYLSTON STREET PROMENADE PLAN
 Boylston Street 1971: Rear Cover (top)
 The Plan: Rear Cover (lower)
 Boylston Street 1972: Front Cover

